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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000888

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LH](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION WILLING TO TAKE HARD
LINE AGAINST LUKASHENKO -- IF OTHERS WILL, TOO

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Alexander Titolo for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Minister of Transportation and Communication Petras Cesna, meeting with the Ambassador on August 25, emphasized his eagerness to see increased US investment in Lithuania, thanked the Ambassador for the close cooperation between his Ministry and the USG, and showed a willingness to consider radio broadcasts into Belarus, recognizing there could be political or economic consequences. The Ambassador highlighted areas of cooperation in the transportation sector, including the ongoing TDA study of security the Port of Klaipeda. Cesna offered a tentative prediction that future airport upgrades in Kaunas or Vilnius are more likely than the construction of a new airport. Cesna has not yet mastered his new portfolio, nor entirely hung up his hat as Minister of Economy. The apparent willingness of this accomplished and experienced politician to challenge Lukashenko to promote democracy in Belarus is encouraging. End Summary.

COOPERATION WITH USG

12. (U) The Ambassador called on Petras Cesna, who took office in June after his predecessor became Minister of the Economy. Cesna himself had been Minister of the Economy in Lithuania's previous government. The Ambassador briefed Cesna on several important projects the USG has supported that began during the tenure of the prior Minister. Chief among these is the security assessment of the Port of Klaipeda that the U.S. company SAIC is conducting under a USD415,000 grant from the U.S. Trade Development Agency. The Ambassador also highlighted past cooperation which in 2004 led to the U.S. Department of Energy installing radiation detection devices at Vilnius airport. Cesna thanked the Ambassador for these projects and for the Voluntary Visitors program the USG arranged in May for Lithuanian transportation experts.

ALL AGREE - U.S. INVESTMENT IN LITHUANIA NOT HIGH ENOUGH

13. (U) Cesna agreed with the Ambassador that increasing U.S. investment in Lithuania will help deepen the already close ties between the nations. The Minister pointed out that United States currently ranks seventh as a source of foreign investment in Lithuania, "even behind Estonia." The Ambassador said that informing U.S. businesses and potential investors about opportunities in Lithuania was one of his highest priorities and he reviewed the Embassy's recent efforts, which included trade and investment conferences in London and Washington. Cesna offered that Lithuania could do a better job of promoting itself as an attractive investment location. The Ambassador pressed Cesna to ensure that U.S. companies are equally considered in future tenders emanating for his Ministry, specifically noting that he expects there will be significant interest in anticipated airport upgrade projects.

NO NEW AIRPORT LIKELY

14. (SBU) The Ambassador asked Cesna for his outlook on the GOL's plans for airport upgrades and the rumored possibility of constructing a new airport between Vilnius and Kaunas. Cesna, noting that he personally hoped for expansion of the Vilnius airport, but thought that development of the airport in Lithuania's second city of Kaunas was more strategically advantageous and more likely. Cesna doubted that rumors of an entirely new airport somewhere between the two cities would come to fruition.

CALLING LUKASHENKO'S BLUFF

15. (C) Cesna told the Ambassador that, during his time as Minister of Economy, the Minsk regime had threatened to redirect exports away from Klaipeda in response if Lithuania did not guarantee energy sales to Belarus. He said that, while it is important to be sensitive to business interests, especially since Belarusian cargo comprises approximately 23 to 25 percent of exports from Klaipeda, the GOL was not and will not be intimidated into changing its policy. The Ambassador acknowledged the difficult diplomatic job the GOL faces on this issue, and said that Lithuania had distinguished itself through its efforts to promote democracy. Cesna said that he believes that trade and business between Lithuania and Belarus will continue unabated, regardless of the political situation.

16. (C) The Ambassador asked Cesna how he gauged support might be within the GOL for an external broadcasting program that would deliver independent news into Belarus. Cesna said a decision to support such a project would come from the President and Foreign Minister. He stressed that the GOL would not likely take such a step alone, but that he thought Lithuania could undertake such a project jointly with Belarus's other neighbors.

COMMENT

17. (C) Cesna is a seasoned political player and maintains a Minister of Economy's outlook. Cesna's comments on Belarus were surprisingly forward leaning for a Minister who has the responsibility for promoting Klaipeda as an export terminal. If the GOL endorses Lithuanian-based Belarus-aimed radio or TV, it will help to have Cesna, with his business and government ties, defending the course of action and justifying the political and economic risk.
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